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ABSTRACT

Recognition of new demands in Swedish education during the 1960s led to selection of eight principles to be considered in educational facilities planning. These principles concerned (1) freedom of students to change schools, (2) availability of school space for nonschool functions, (3) flexible use of spaces for varied student activities, (4) allowing for alternative student groupings, (5) encouraging staff cooperation and teamwork, (6) facilitating integration of subject matter taught, (7) ready access to media and study material, and (8) integration of remedial education. By 1974 eighteen schools covering varying levels from elementary to secondary levels had been built in the Malmo region with these principles incorporated to some degree. The process used to evaluate these schools and their success in attaining the new educational goals is described in this document, and problems identified in different aspects of the evaluation process are discussed. (Author/PGD)

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Management Analysis Paper

Open Plan Schools in Malmö, Sweden

This document was prepared by Gunilla Röhr as a working document for the IMTEC training course on The Management of Change: Elementary Education, to be held at the Ullensvang Hotel in Lofthus, Norway, 5th - 16th May, 1974.

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The opinions expressed in this paper are those of the authors and, as such, do not necessarily reflect the position of the OECD, or the national authorities concerned.

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The Open Plan Schools in the Malmö Region, Sweden

I. Background

The "Samskap"-organisation

During the 1960's extensive experiments have been developed in Malmö schools among others with team teaching, flexible grouping, integration of subjects and studies organized in units.

As a result of the experimentation, traditionally built school premises came in many cases to be felt insufficient for the new demands. In 1967 the Minister of Finance offered local authorities the chance of planning their school building on a more long-term basis by giving certain guarantees of government subsidies for local authorities that were willing to cooperate with each other and together plan a school building program that from an economic point of view would be more rational. Five local boards of education coordinated their school building activities in accordance with the recommendations made by the Minister of Finance and formed in 1967 an inter-municipal organization called Samskap (from the Swedish "Samverkan mellan sydvästskånska kommuner, arkitekter och pedagoger" - 'Cooperation between municipalities, architects and educationalists in south-west Skåne').

When the educational basis for the school buildings was being planned the experience gained from the experimentation carried out in Malmö served as a reference point. A number of educationalists in Malmö who had been active in the experimental activity mentioned above were asked to make an analysis of the curriculum of 1962 and to draw up a proposal for a revised curriculum that could be made the foundation for a new planning of school buildings. The commission was completed with the help of financial aid from the National Board of Education. These analyses were made the basis of the purely educational planning of the schools. Close cooperation also arose with corresponding developmental work in other countries, particularly the USA, England, Norway and Denmark. The experiences from the USA mainly influenced grades 7-9 in the "grundskolan", while experiences from England more affected the situation in grades 1-6, corresponding to the English primary schools.

The basic ideas behind the open plan schools.

The open plan school in Sweden also means a flexible school. The term "flexible" is not only related to the building but also to the way of organizing the work in the school.

The ideas behind the design of the school building in the "samskap" schools have been summarized in eight different principles, sifted out from various written sources.

These principles are as follows:

1. The principle of variability. It should be possible to change the schools at little cost as a result of new experiences and objectives stated in new curricula.
2. The principle of the integration of different social functions. The schools should be designed in such a way as to make it possible for the premises to be used both by the school and for other social functions, such as hobby and spare-time activities.
3. The principle of varied student activities. The premises should be so designed as to facilitate varying activities.
4. The principle of alternative student groupings.
5. The principle of team work. Premises with an open-plan design are intended to facilitate increased cooperation between staff.
6. The principle of subject cooperation. The design of the premises, particularly in grades 7-9, should be such that it facilitates subject integration.
7. The principle of varied choice of media. When designing the schools, the aim should be to collect the study material as close to the study areas as possible.
8. The principle of the integration of remedial teaching. The ambition is to have coordinated remedial teaching as for as possible, in the form of companion teaching directly in the classes and clinic teaching instead of special remedial classes.

These eight principles have, to a varying extent and with varying degrees of emphasis in different building projects, come to be the main guidelines when the schools are being designed.

The first two "samskap"-schools were opened in 1969/70 in Malmö. Today, 1974, there are 18 of these schools in the Malmö region, 12 of which are schools with lower/intermediate levels, 5 include all levels and one has only the upper level of the comprehensive school.

The extent to which this principles have influenced the layout of the schools in question is extremely varied. The margin that different schools have for paying attention to a large number of practical considerations in organization and activity varies greatly. Access to various types of rooms and the relation between open and closed space is very different. For this reason it is inappropriate to consider the "samskap" schools as a single concept, although all have a higher degree of open space than traditionally planned schools.

The eight principles mentioned above have been used as guidelines in

the following attempt to evaluate the functions of the open schools.

Evaluation

The scientific problems involved in making an interdisciplinary study of a school environment present great difficulties since no factors can be maintained constant, and a continual presentation of preliminary data gives feedback to the schools and influences the subsequent work there. This is especially the case when trying to make reliable measurements of effects, which are related to how the teaching at the school is arranged. For the most part, therefore, the investigations have taken the form of process studies, in order to find out to what extent activities that are particularly recommended in the curriculum occur in the open plan schools.

The scientific investigations started in 1970 in cooperation between the School of Education and the municipal authorities inside an organization called the Malmö Region Educational Developmental Work (MED) can be described in five steps.

1970, step 1: A first explorativ investigation in one school of the problems which might be found in an open plan school. A reference group was set up in Malmö among others in order to increase the opportunities of the teacher organizations to participate.

1971/72, step 2-3: A more systematic study of the problems, related to the eight principles of work in open plan schools.

Studies of attitudes and development of attitudes among pupils, teachers and non-teaching staff towards the open plan schools.

Development of research methods, also including interdiciplinary methods, where members from the Department of Sociology at Lund University and from the Department of Functional Building Theory at the Lund Institute of Technology participated together with the representatives from the project, run by the Department of Educational Research at the Malmö School of Education. These studies included eight schools, of which six had only lower and intermediate levels (grades 1-6), one all grades and one only upper level (grades 7-9) of the comprehensive school.

1973, step 4: A comparativ study of effects and pupil development in six open plan schools and six traditionally built schools in Malmö, totaly 4500 pupils, lower and intermediate levels.

The design:

1. Analysis of background conditions: i.e. pupils, teachers, physical environment.
2. Analysis of the educational process: i.e. organization of school work, the social interplay.

3. Measuring of results: social-emotional and cognitiv development of the pupils, measured at three different occasions. A similar design has been used in an analysis of the secondary level.

1974-1976; step 5: is being planned as intensive studies of special problems. This project intends to work according to a so called problem-solving method, where teachers at the participating schools choose and analyse the problems which are to be solved in cooperation with the reasearch workers. Alternative solutions will be tested in the school by the teachers and evaluated and analysed with assistens of the researchers.

Two open plan schools and two traditionally built schools, intermediate level, are invited to participate. At each school a reference group composed of representatives of all involved groups will be responsible for planning and drawing up outlines for the work in the schools in cooperation with the project personal. Concrete arrangements in order to facilitate a more flexible use of the resources, both in grouping of the pupils and in utilizing staff and study materials is of main interest in this work.

II. Change analysis

Some of the problems found in the evaluative process of the open plan schools have already been referred to in part I, as well as some headlines of a design for the future research work.

The following is a summary of problems from the point of view of the researchers. (Bertil Gran (Ed.), Malmö, 1972.) The discussion is referred to the eight basic principles earlier mentioned.

1. The principle of adaptability

The content of the principle of adaptability is so diffuse that it is difficult to use it as a basis for a more clear-cut discussion. Adaptability in these school buildings can be seen from two aspects. One applies more to the future and is concerned with the changes that can in the long run be made in the layout of the schools and that require structural alterations. The other applies more to the present and concerns above all the degree of flexibility permitted by the schools' buildings and fittings for the present day's different pedagogic activities.

It has been shown that some modifications can be made while the school is actually being build or later by, for example, putting in or taking away partitions.

The furnishings and the use of partitions have been modified continously at serveral of the schools. In this respect the principle of adaptability can be said to have been fulfilled.

In all the schools the practical room-capacity with the normal number of pupils is so mych higher than the calculated minimum that the scope for being able to choose a suitable room for a particular activity should be rather large. When the school has to accept more pupils than planned, a noticeable reduction in flexibility in the use of rooms and in teaching methods is caused.

2. The principle of integrating the school and different social activities

It has not been possible within the limits of this investigation to pay special attention to what are in themselves very important problems connected with the role of the school in society. The schools are gradually being forced to permit their premises to serve not only the pupils but also the recreational activities of other members of society. This applies in particular to rooms such as the dining room, cafeteria, information hall, study hall, mediotek, studio and outdoor facilities. In some schools, a youth (recreation) center has been integrated into the school buildings, with a consequent dual use of rooms and certain other resources. This kind of integration can give rise to difficulties, especially where the staff are concerned, for various reasons, such as there being two different principals and different ways of calculating official duties. The "disturbance" that can arise in balancing the functions of the school and the recreational activities needs to be paid due attention.

3. The principle of variation in pupil activities

The school buildings have been designed to allow varied educational activities. There are special rooms or open spaces for information, rhythmics/drama, practical/esthetical activities, working with "messy" materials etc. The opportunities for making practical use of the different rooms for varying activities varies from school to school. The analyses also indicate that there are essential differences between the shape that different activities take in different rooms. Thus different activities take on a different emphasis according to the type of room. More detailed studies are needed, however, to find out to what extent the design of the accommodation "directs" the activities and to what extent the planning of the school work can direct the use of the accommodation. If there is too little scope for flexible planning of how the rooms are to be used, there is a risk that certain activities will become too dominant. The fear that the different sections may disturb one another can lead to too great a proportion of independent work in the form of reading and writing assignments based on written instructions, at the expense of more creative activities or group discussions in the open accommodation.

The teachers are largely unanimous in their opinion that disturbing noises are a considerable factor in the open plan rooms, even if the sound level is also considered high in the ordinary classrooms. At the same time, the teachers react positively to seeing other sections at work. At one school there has been a report that the practical/esthetical activities have disturbed the more theoretical school work.

4. The principle of variation in student-groupings

The schools have been built with rooms of different sizes, partly so as to make it possible to vary the size of the groups. At several schools the different possibilities seem to have been put to good use, while at others they only seem to have been utilized occasionally. This fact can be connected with the different ways in which the principle of team teaching has been applied, but this point will be discussed below.

In general, both teachers and pupils consider working in small groups to be the most positive form. It must be remembered, however, that the small groups of pupils are made possible by having large groups on other occasions.

An important question that has not been answered satisfactorily is the need of the pupil to belong to a permanent group as opposed to his need to meet different groups of friends and make more contacts with adults.

The class as an administrative unit has been retained at the schools. At one school the class has largely been abandoned as a grouping unit, at least in the middle school, in favor of a more flexible grouping system within the framework of the teaching team.

To summarize, it can be said that there are greater opportunities for varying the pupil groupings in an open plan environment than in a traditionally built school. These opportunities have also to a large extent been exploited. From the point of view of leading the work, it seems to be an advantage that several teachers together can use the study hall for leading a varying number of small groups, while on the other hand the pupils feel that the group-work can be done just as well in a smaller area.

5. The principle of team-work

The open environment is thought by the teachers to lead to increased cooperation. The design of the school buildings seems not only to encourage team-work at all levels, but to a large extent to make it necessary. This cooperation is felt by the majority of the teachers to be positive. The non-teaching staff also feel that increased contact with both teachers and pupils is a positive feature of their work.

It is relatively common for two or three teachers to share the responsibility for the work with a large number of pupils in the larger rooms, i.e. large schoolroom and study hall, while on the whole the system of "one teacher-one class" seems to predominate in the ordinary classrooms. It seems as if real team teaching tends to come about if the school buildings allow several teachers and groups to be in the same room at the same time.

Thus team-work is generally considered to be something positive. At the same time, the teachers sometimes judge the results of the work to be less good when several classes work together and feel that the pupils are disturbed by seeing other sections at work. This tension between social-psychological and achievement-orientated points of view appears to go very deep and exists not only in open plan schools but in the school system as a whole.

6. The principle of cooperation between different subjects

This principle is of particular significance for the senior school. In the junior and middle school it should in general be easier to satisfy it, since the class teacher system in itself offers plenty of opportunities for integration of different subjects. This cooperation between subjects has in several "samskap" schools been expanded across grade divisions into wider topic studies, in which it is possible to make use of the different interests and specialities of the class teachers.

The principle of subject cooperation is closely connected with the question of teacher teams. There is an important problem here, which we have been unable to investigate in this study. Teacher teams can be constructed to encourage cooperation between subjects, but also alternatively to promote cooperation and possibly teacher specialization within a subject. The latter usually comes into question in skill-training subjects. The best way of satisfying and balancing these two principles is a subject that requires further discussion and analysis.

7. The principle of providing a wide choice of media

When designing the open schools, one of the aims has been to place the study-materials as near to the study areas as possible. Thus books, mediotek etc. have generally been placed centrally, often in the study hall. In the senior school there is in addition special material placed close to the different "bases" for subjects or groups of subjects (social and scientific subjects, foreign languages etc.). Comparative studies are necessary, however, to find out whether or not this easy availability has increased the use of the material, and to what extent the open placing of the study material inspires the pupils to voluntary studies.

The teacher and pupil assessments of the availability and organization of the study materials imply that there are such large differences between the schools that continued and more intensive studies are needed before any definite conclusion can be drawn. Questions concerning study materials and their use are being dealt with more closely in a special project, the LINS project (from Swedish, Läromedel i nya skolor - Media in new schools).

8. The principle of integrating remedial teaching

The important question of how the open schools can meet the needs of pupils handicapped in different ways deserves a more thorough investigation than has been possible here.

Most open schools have some kind of clinic facilities. Separate special classes only existed at two of the eight schools, however. Several of the schools had some form of coordinated remedial teaching that directly combined clinic teaching and companion-teachership in the ordinary classes. The teachers assessed the resources of the schools for pupil welfare as being either acceptable or somewhat insufficient. This assessment would probably be similar if applied to other schools. The teachers at all the schools studied are agreed that remedial teachers can be utilized better in the open environment than in more traditional schools. It happens often that remedial teachers work together with the other teachers, particularly in the larger schoolrooms, where they then become part of the teacher team. In studies of a particular topic, the remedial teacher takes on a rather different role from usual.

Internal tensions between the principles

The principles on which the work of the "samskap" group and the design of the open schools have been based cannot be simply placed beside one another to give some kind of total cumulative effect. Often they must necessarily conflict. In the individual case, whether it concerns the layout of buildings or teaching, one is often forced to give one principle priority over another. It is not possible to decide upon a system of priorities that will then apply once and for all. For this reason different practical solutions are produced, even though the basic principles are the same.

The variations between the schools in the layout of the buildings can be seen as an attempt to gain experience about the most suitable balance between different principles. There are signs in the answers to both the interviews and the questionnaires in this study that the schools themselves often feel uncertain about the purpose behind the layout of a particular part of the school and about how the work of the school can best be carried out. This is almost self-evident, since profound changes within teaching can only be come about through a demanding and far-reaching process.

Requests for more information about the work of the school have been made in several contexts, by the non-teaching staff among others. The teacher questionnaires have also revealed a need for information and further training. These observations indicate that great importance must be placed on staff-administrative problems when open plan schools are being planned and started.

The principle of individualization

Both questionnaires and interviews have shown that the attitudes of pupils, teachers and other personnel at the schools have been consistently positive and that negative points of view have largely concerned certain specific aspects. These aspects must also be taken into consideration, however. In conclusion, therefore, we shall touch upon the specific but basic question of individualization.

The goal that the comprehensive school has of promoting the all-round development of every individual naturally lies behind the principles given here for the design of open plan schools. In striving to satisfy this goal, different activities, groupings, cooperation, study-

materials, organization etc. have all been taken into account. Our analyses indicate that this is a fruitful way of approaching these problems, since it makes it possible to translate the goals concretely into the function of schoolrooms and the layout of schoolrooms. This contributes to producing a better interaction between the individual and his environment.

Our analyses also indicate, however, that this kind of educational activity needs to be complemented by the study of psychological and sociological reactions. The teachers have stated that, in their opinion, certain types of pupils, such as those who are insecure or intellectually handicapped, can have difficulties in a school environment that is too open. This indicates one of the central problems tied up with individualization, namely the need to consider individual variations, behavioral patterns, attitudes etc. As the development of the school environment continues, therefore, the purer aspects of educational function and material should be combined with analyses working on the basis of the needs and potentialities of different individuals, the behavioral patterns of groups and the shape of social interaction.